Hints & Hacks

Make Your Own Antenna Launcher; Use Camouflage to Deter Theft

A Homebrew Antenna Launcher

One challenge that most hams are faced with is figuring out how to get their wire antenna up in the air.

Here's a homebrewed slingshot that uses a fishing reel (see Figure 1). If you want to try this yourself, please note that some states and municipalities regulate the ownership and sale of slingshots. It would be a good idea to check ahead of time.

▲ **Figure 1** — The finished slingshot launcher. [Steve Allen, KZ4TN, photo]
▶ **Figure 2** — The press-in nut and knob screw. [Steve Allen, KZ4TN, photo]
▼ **Figure 3** — The attachment of the reel to the aluminum channel. [Steve Allen, KZ4TN, photo]

The three major components to this device are the slingshot, the fishing reel, and the method to connect the two. I drilled out the bottom of the slingshot handle to accommodate a ¼ × 20 press-in nut (see Figure 2). These nuts have a shank that is meant to be inserted into sheet metal or other sheet materials. I ordered these from an industrial supply house (McMaster-Carr at **www.mcmaster.com**), but you may be able to find them at a local hardware store. I used epoxy adhesive to hold the nut in place. I found the ¼ × 20 knob screw at my nearby hardware store.

The reel was sourced at a local discount department store and came with 10-pound test fishing line already spooled. I taped the foot of the reel to a piece of tubing that I found in my junk box (see Figure 3).

To complete the assembly, I used a piece of C channel aluminum (ordered from the same industrial supply house) that was the same width as the base of the slingshot. I used two U-bolts to hold the tubing to the C channel aluminum. To finish the project, I purchased some ¾-ounce and 1-ounce sinkers and painted them fluorescent orange and green to denote the weights.

If you choose to use this method, place the weight in the slingshot cup and press the button on the reel to release the line, take aim, and let it fly. Make sure the fishing line is free to unspool from the reel. It's best to do a dozen or so dry runs with small rocks, so you get a feel for how far to pull back the slingshot and how to aim. I have found that the ¾-ounce weight is enough to have the line freely fall back to earth and is relatively easy to find due to the bright color. I've been able to shoot lines up as high as 60 feet.

Once you have the line over your target branch and the sinker on the ground, remove the sinker and attach a long piece of chalk line. This step requires attention to detail because you must keep the knot small so it doesn't hang up in the crotch of a branch, yet it must be strong enough to not come untied while pulling it up and over the branch. It helps to tape over the knot

to smooth the surface of the knot junction.

Once the chalk line is over the tree, you can attach the antenna halyard to the chalk line and pull it back over the branch, again paying close attention to the knotting method. — *Steve Allen, KZ4TN,* **kk1vt@arrl.net**

Concealing Radios Deters Theft

As a retired chief of police, I always encourage people to do three simple things to help prevent thefts from their vehicles:

1) Lock the car.

2) Remove items of value from the vehicle.

3) Park in a lighted area (if possible).

Still, I am amazed at the items people leave in plain sight within their unlocked cars — wallets, purses, laptops, and even full sets of golf clubs.

A transceiver in a car is like a beacon to thieves (see Figure 4), but taking it in and out every day is usually impractical. If the rig must remain in your vehicle, you need to reduce its visual profile. Some transceivers feature designs that allow their control heads to be mounted in the open while the rest of the radio is under a seat or in the trunk. This is useful because only the control head is visible, so it is the only thing that would need to be replaced in the event of theft.

If this transceiver arrangement isn't an option for you, consider at least concealing the entire radio. In my truck, the radios are close to the floor and the carpet is black. My wife made a cover for my transceiver out of black denim (see Figure 5). It's very easy to remove and put back on. In many instances, simply hiding the rig is sufficient to prevent it being stolen.

▶ **Figure 4** — A set of radios in plain sight is a burglary waiting to happen. [Mike Burg, N8QQN, photo]

▼ **Figure 5** — Something as simple as a piece of black denim may be all it takes to make a potential thief less interested in the contents of your vehicle. [Mike Burg, N8QQN, photo]

Another clever bit of camouflage is to take an old power cord and a piece of coax with a PL-259 connector on it and sew it to the bottom of the fabric cover to make it look as if the radio has been removed.

Be sure to write down the makes, models, and serial numbers of everything in your mobile installation. Take photos of your equipment as well. This information will be helpful to law enforcement in the identification and recovery of your equipment if it's taken, and your insurance company will appreciate it as well. And, of course, a car alarm is always a worthwhile investment. — *Mike Burg, N8QQN,* **mburg@neo.rr.com**

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